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Healthcare Business News



Waxman's retirement leaves opening for new leading Democratic voice on healthcare

By [Virgil Dickson](#)

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Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), a **health policy** giant who played a leading role in drafting the **Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act**, will retire at the end of this congressional session. His departure leaves pundits wondering which Congressional Democrat will next emerge as the party's leading voice on healthcare.



Waxman

Waxman will have served 40 years in Congress by the time he retires. In his previous role as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, he shepherded House consideration of the ACA in 2009. Over the years, he also was involved in legislation involving Medicaid expansion, tobacco regulation and children's health.

"He will be really missed," said Tim Jost, a Washington & Lee University law professor. "He understands health policy and how the healthcare system works better than anyone else."

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In addition to the ACA, other highlights of Waxman's congressional career include several bills he wrote in the 1980s and '90s to expand **Medicaid** eligibility for children and pregnant women. The Ryan White CARE Act provides medical care and other essential services to people living with HIV/AIDS, and the Waxman-Hatch Act streamlined the generic drug regulatory approval process. Generic drugs now account for 80% of prescriptions filled in the U.S.

"As a result of that bill, the average American has an access to affordable medications that most people in other countries don't have," said Avik Roy, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

In a comment from his office, Waxman noted that he "abhors the extremism of the Tea Party Republicans," but added that he is "not leaving out of frustration with Congress. " He insists that there are opportunities to

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make real progress, but feels his time has come to move on.

"He has been a major force for liberal policies, but under **President Obama**, the policy initiative has largely been taken away from Congress—both Republicans and Democrats alike—and centered in the White House," said Joseph Antos, a healthcare economist with the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute. "I can understand why he would decide to cut out now, rather than being second string to the President."

One thing his colleagues will miss is his willingness to put aside partisan differences and find solutions. "Working together over the last three years, we have never allowed our principled differences to prevent us from finding common ground where we can and delivering a number of bipartisan successes, especially in the effort to improve the public health," Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.), chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, said in a statement. He recalls their most successful collaboration was in the '90s when they were able to double research funding for the National Institutes of Health, in an effort to help the federal agency discover new medical breakthroughs.

The departure raises serious questions about who will succeed him as the champion of health policy issues. Waxman's retirement announcement follows that of **Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.)** and Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), who also played key roles in the passage of the ACA.

"I think his absence from the playing field moving forward will have an impact, and will mean, as he said, that others will have to step up," said John Shadegg, a former U.S. Republican Congressman from Arizona and current partner at the law firm Steptoe & Johnson. "But I'm not sure who that could be, especially with the degree of knowledge he has."

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